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UNCLAS E F T O SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 000498

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: LOCAL GOVERNANCE DIRECTORATE UNVEILS SOCIAL
OUTREACH PROGRAM

REF: A. 07 KABUL 3714
[B](#). KABUL 262
[C](#). KABUL 398

Classified By: DCM Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU/NF) The Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) unveiled on February 14 the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program, which aims to establish functional district governance by appointing community councils and work with them to develop memoranda of understanding committing local communities to responsible action in exchange for development and support packages from the government. The new plan is a reworked and expanded version of the original Community Self-Defense Program, expunged of the controversial Community Defense Volunteers concept (Refs A & B). Senior Afghan officials reacted positively, saying the plan is what has been missing in Afghanistan's governance efforts. The IDLG and UK Embassy insist that the program is an important national initiative not linked to local self-defense forces, but the British may yet harbor hopes of supplementing the IDLG's efforts with a local security component in Helmand. The IDLG will need donor support (\$26 million for its first 18 months), the support of key ministries to implement the program (particularly the Ministry of Interior), and the support of the Parliament, which plans to address the IDLG's proposed Law on Local Administration in the coming weeks. The plan also touches on the IDLG's politically sensitive efforts to empower governors, a key feature of their planned reforms that will be more fully articulated in its five-year Strategic Work Plan. This strategy is consistent with Assistant Secretary Boucher's plans to focus attention and resources on improving governance at the district level.

IDLG Presents Plan to Strengthen Local Governance

[1](#)2. (SBU) At the February 14 meeting of the Policy Action Group (PAG), Independent Directorate for Local Governance

(IDLG) Deputy Director Barna Karimi presented the Afghanistan Social Outreach Program plan, aimed at improving district governance. The plan is a reworked and expanded version of the original Community Self-Defense Program, expunged of the controversial security component that had sought to link appointed councils to local Community Defense Volunteers (Refs A & B). The new Social Outreach Program aims to establish functional district governance through appointed councils and linking them to the central government through provincial governors.

13. (SBU) The Social Outreach Program's objectives are to (1) improve sub-national oversight and management; (2) develop provincial profiles and data; (3) replace corrupt personnel; (4) establish and work with appointed "community councils" (ref C); and (5) work with local communities to compile district development packages based on district development plans. The IDLG plans to pursue these objectives through provincial-level interagency "Technical Working Group Teams" chaired by provincial governors, and to implement them through district-level "Program Implementation Units" led by district administrators in consultation with the community councils. These groups will develop a memorandum of understanding with each local community committing it to responsible action (including on security and counter-narcotics) in exchange for a development and support package from the government, coordinated with donors. The plan makes coordination with CSTC-A's Focused District Development (FDD) program a priority. The plan includes a list of indicators that illustrate the effect they are trying to achieve, such as "requests for visits of government officials" and "the number of anti-government elements arrested."

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14. (SBU) The IDLG will launch the program in 11 provinces facing the most acute security challenges: Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Logar, Kapisa, Wardak, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul. The IDLG plans to expand the program nationally in the next three years. The program's budget for the eleven provinces for its first 18 months is just under \$26 million, modest compared to other governance support programs.

Plan Garner's Broad Afghan, International Support

15. (SBU) Senior Afghan officials and international donors voiced support for the program at the February 14 PAG meeting. Minister of Defense Wardak said the intention is very good -- what everyone has been trying to do. He noted that "historically it has been the communities that have defended the country, not the army," and that citizen and public buy-in is as important today as it has ever been. His only criticism was with the 3-5 year timeline for implementation, exhorting the IDLG to "go to every province now." National Director for Security Saleh questioned the idea of signing MOUs with the communities individually, ironically following his sharp criticism earlier in the same meeting of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's failure to demand good behavior from communities in exchange for receiving funds from its National Solidarity Program (Ref C). Karimi responded by emphasizing the benefits of government interaction individually tailored to each community, but based on the same core principles of reciprocal obligations. Minister of Education Atmar said the idea behind the MOUs drew from Afghan tradition, and that IDLG's plan addresses the major flaw in all our programs since the Bonn Conference.

16. (SBU) International officials also praised the program. UK Ambassador Sherard Cowper-Coles made a strong statement in favor of the proposal. Acting UNAMA SRSG Chris Alexander agreed, underlining the needs for equitable treatment of communities, for service delivery to give it

all credibility, and for action as soon as possible. COMISAF General Dan McNeill cautioned that six of the 11 priority provinces have divisive fault lines making work with the communities difficult. Karimi responded that IDLG is prepared to address the challenges these tribal divisions imply.

IDLG, UK Insist No Link to Local Security Forces

¶7. (SBU) The IDLG is sensitive to international criticism following its ill-considered albeit well-intentioned Community Defense Volunteers concept. Karimi acknowledged that the security component of the original plan was a tactical mistake that set back the IDLG's initial engagement with the international community. Once bitten, they now feel the need for clear donor support and validation before proceeding. (Karimi struggled with what to name the new program to make absolutely clear that the IDLG had abandoned its direct security role.)

¶8. (SBU/NF) Karimi and UK diplomats confirmed that the UK Embassy has been working closely with the IDLG on the Social Outreach Program and is providing about \$8 million in support. UK diplomats have said that they have watered down their 'arbaki' traditional local defense force proposal to a vigorous community watch program, which is yet to be clearly defined. They seem to see the IDLG's Social Outreach Program as a useful governance program nation-wide, but they may yet retain the hope of piggy-backing their latest toned-down version of the local security concept on the IDLG's efforts in Helmand.

Implementation Requires Ministries and Parliament

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¶9. (SBU) Armed with a sound concept, the IDLG needs to engage key ministries to fully implement the plan, particularly the Ministry of Interior (MOI). In its pilot program in Wardak province, the IDLG worked with the MOI to replace the Chief of Police, deploy several hundred more police to the province, increase local police recruitment, and identify and arrest key trouble-makers in collaboration with the communities; only then did local leaders agree to participate in formal district councils. The IDLG's success will depend on its ability to work with the MOI (and other ministries) to make this kind of coordinated effort succeed. Popal has President Karzai's support, but getting the ministries to follow his lead will be a challenge.

¶10. (SBU) Parliament may yet have a say as well. After six months of promising work on strategy development, consensus building among the ministries, the Wardak pilot program, and personnel changes (especially of governors), the IDLG plans to release its comprehensive Strategic Work Plan within weeks, which will clarify its strategy and link it to concrete goals. (The Social Outreach Program is one component of this broader strategy.) On the cusp of going operational, Karimi said Parliament plans to formally consider the IDLG's mandate within two weeks when it takes up the Law on Local Administration, proposed by the IDLG and recently approved by the Cabinet. (President Karzai had legal authority to create the new independent directorate under the executive branch. Since the responsibilities of the ministries are defined by law, some have questioned whether Karzai had the legal authority to transfer the MOI's civil administration division to the new IDLG without consulting Parliament.) Karimi was sanguine about achieving rapid approval. However, Parliament remains bogged down in negotiations over the budget, is faced with contentious decisions about the election law and calendar, and has made defense of legislative prerogatives a centerpiece of its activities.

¶11. (SBU) The IDLG's ideas about empowering governors, addressed in passing toward the end of the Social Outreach Plan, are important. Having installed better governors, the IDLG plans to build up their coordination role, ultimately to give them a more robust role in provincial planning, budgeting, and spending. (Governors currently have veto power over spending by the line ministries, but no proactive authority to plan, budget, or shift spending priorities.) This expanded role for governors would help increase the coherence, coordination, and effectiveness of provincial government. It would also require line ministries to cede some degree of control over provincial finances and operations, which is likely to be a tough sell politically. Empowering governors is a central feature of the draft five-year IDLG Strategic Work Plan, which is to be presented officially within weeks (Embassy has received an advance draft text).

¶12. (SBU) The Social Outreach Plan is at least partially intended to build up the governors' authorities. The plan is designed to recreate the pre-1979 governance mechanisms in Afghanistan by encouraging a loose social compact in which the respective roles, responsibilities, obligations, rewards, and punishments of the government, tribes, and communities were well understood, facilitating a loose weave between the state and traditional structures to function more or less to the satisfaction of all parties. Governors were the key to this system and re-creating it will no doubt give them greater political stature. Finally, the IDLG's focus on district level governance accords nicely with the U.S. objective, as articulated by Assistant Secretary Boucher, to make the districts the focus of our governance efforts in 2008.

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